

Rae Giesing, mother of a murder victim
Testimony in support of SB 280 to repeal the death penalty

In 2006, my son Gregory was murdered in his home, and a hole was torn in my universe. It is absolutely impossible to describe what it feels like to lose a child, much less to lose a child to violence. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. Now that I have been thrown into a world where murder and trials are no longer distant or abstract notions, I have paid close attention to the efforts in Connecticut to repeal the death penalty. My personal experience as a victims' family member have provided me with many reasons why I think we'll be better off without the death penalty.

For starters, I wouldn't wish the death penalty process on any grieving family. I'm incredibly grateful my family wasn't put through the ordeal that comes with the death penalty. Capital cases nearly always take longer to go to trial and then last longer. Then when the trial was over, with its separate guilt and sentencing phases, our journey would just be beginning.

In Connecticut, only one person has been executed in the last 50 years. When someone is sentenced to death, a slough of constitutionally mandated safeguards go into effect and the actual execution is a distant blip on the horizon. So the family members wait vigilantly for the day when the offender's punishment will finally be carried out. In our case, prison was the punishment and we were able to see that punishment carried out immediately. We know that young man is suffering dearly for taking the life of my son and won't be a threat to anyone else. I can't imagine how my life would be stuck on pause if I were still waiting for the "real" punishment of an execution to take place.

I also don't trust the finality of the death penalty. In my son's case, I have lingering questions about what actually happened the night he was killed and if everyone responsible has been held accountable. I believe that the police and prosecutors in our case did the best that they could, but questions remain, as they so often do in homicide cases.

We simply cannot presume absolute certainty, which is what we must demand if lives are at stake. Obviously, no one should ever sentence someone to death without complete certainty, but that simply is not the case in this country. There have been 140 death row exonerations across the country, plus numerous wrongful convictions in Connecticut for serious crimes, such as rape and murder. Mistakes happen far too often to ever trust our government with the death penalty.

The reality is, there are things that could help victims' families move forward in the aftermath of violent crime. My grandchildren have seen their grandma sad far too often. It would be incredible if there were state funding to provide counseling for them to process the murder of their uncle and the devastation it has wreaked on our entire family. We currently spend upwards of \$4 million each year to try capital cases – this is above and beyond what we would spend if life without the possibility of release were the maximum punishment. \$4 million each year for what? 1 execution in 50 years. It would make a lot more sense to use that money to help the thousands of siblings, parents, nieces and nephews left behind in the wake of murder.

I stand with my living sons, and in the memory of their lost brother. We are asking for an end to the death penalty in Connecticut. It simply doesn't do us any good.